

*Kids • Families • Schools • Communities*



*Social • Emotional • Intellectual • Behavioral*

# The Implementation of *Success4*: A Cross-Case Analysis

Peter J. Holly  
Dr. Linda Munger



Iowa Department of Education

November 2000



## **State Board of Education**

Corine A. Hadley, President, Newton  
Sally J. Frudden, Vice President, Charles City  
Gregory A. Forristall, Macedonia  
Gregory D. McClain, Cedar Falls  
Mary Jean Montgomery, Spencer  
Donald L. Roby, Decorah  
Gene E. Vincent, Carroll  
Kay Wagner, Bettendorf  
John C. White, Iowa City

## **Administration**

Ted Stilwill, Director and Executive Officer  
of the State Board of Education  
Gail Sullivan, Chief of Policy and Planning

## **Division of Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education**

Judy Jeffrey, Administrator  
Brenda Oas, Chief, Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services  
James Clark, Consultant, School Social Work Services  
Joe Herrity, Consultant, Community Education and Service Learning  
Lois Irwin, Consultant, Administration & School Improvement  
Suana Wessendorf Knau, Consultant, Behavior Disorders  
Linda Miller, Consultant, Strategic System Development, Safe and Drug-Free  
Schools and Communities  
Ray Morley, Consultant, Homeless Children and Youth and At-risk Students  
Deb Samson, Parent Coordinator, PE Connection Project  
Mary Schertz, Consultant, Early Childhood Special Education  
Jane Today, Consultant, Character Education and School Improvement

It is the policy of the Iowa Department of Education not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, religion, creed, age or marital status in its programs or employment practices. If you have questions or grievances related to this policy please contact Chief, Bureau of Administration and School Improvement Services, Grimes State Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146, (515) 281-5811.



## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>Acknowledgement .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Membership .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Training .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Personal Definitions of <i>Success</i>4 .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Community Involvement .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Shared Visioning .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Needs Assessment .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Goals .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Action Planning .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Supports .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Implementation .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Change Management .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Characteristics of a Successful Initiative .....</b>	<b>26</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to thank all those participants at the following Iowa *Success4* sites without whose full cooperation this research project would not have been possible:

- **Centerville Community School District**, Centerville
- **Charles City Community School District**, Charles City
- **Prairie Heights Elementary School**, Cedar Rapids
- **Prescott Early Learning Center**, Dubuque
- **Greenfield Senior High School**, Greenfield
- **Griswold Community School District**, Griswold
- **Galva-Holstein Community School District**, Holstein
- **Turkey Valley Elementary School**, Jackson Junction
- **Anson Elementary School**, Marshalltown
- **Mount Pleasant Community School District**, Mount Pleasant
- **North Kossuth Community School District**, Swea City
- **Logan Middle School**, Waterloo
- **Webster City Middle School**, Webster City



## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF *SUCCESS4*: A CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

### INTRODUCTION

The intent of *Success4* as a statewide initiative is to increase the capacities of Iowa schools, families, and communities to meet the social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral needs of all children and youth. The 1998-99 school year was a planning year in schools and communities across the state of Iowa. The 1999-2000 school year has been the first year of implementation. The purpose of this research project was to study the implementation efforts at a representative sample of sites, complete case study reports for each of the sites, and then write this cross-case analysis.

Judging by the evidence gathered at the case study sites, *Success4* is alive and well at the local level. In fact, it is flourishing. Whether the sites visited are truly representative of what is happening statewide is, of course, another question. What can be said with some authority, however, is that in this somewhat random selection of sites, *Success4* is highly valued, is the focus of a great deal of enthusiasm, commitment, and endeavor and is impacting the lives of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members in significant ways.

A deeply satisfying feature of this case study research project has been its acceptance and impact at the site level. As a result of the first two-day visit, relationships were established which meant that the ensuing 'interim report' received the serious attention of those involved locally. Indeed, when the second visit occurred and the challenges arising from the interim report were discussed, it was gratifyingly noticeable that the sites were already working on the kind of issues addressed in the list of challenges. Sometimes the site members had embarked on this new work under their own volition and sometimes they were directly responding to what they saw as the

“  
*Success4*  
  
*is alive*  
  
*and well*  
  
*at the*  
  
*local*  
  
*level.*  
  
*In fact,*  
  
*it is*  
”  
*flourishing.*

“  
***What became  
very clear  
during the  
case study  
research  
is that  
none of the  
sites were  
starting  
Success4  
school  
improvement  
with a  
clean slate.***  
”

challenges in the original report. This degree of synchronicity around the challenge issues is the most satisfying part of this case study research program thus far. The original purpose of this research project, however, was to be both formative and summative in nature. This cross-case analysis is an end-of-year summary of all the main, recurring issues and themes arising across the individual case studies.

The sections in this cross-case analysis generally follow the same sections of the individual site reports (which themselves were based on the questions in the interview schedule used during the site visits). It should be emphasized, however, that interview material was only one form of data collected. Triangulation, the juxtaposition of different kinds of data, was always the goal.

## MEMBERSHIP

Most of the key participants in *Success4* (at the building, district, and AEA levels) have been involved since its inception. Some of them had previously been involved in the Iowa Behavioral Initiative (IBI), the forerunner to *Success4*. What became very clear during the case study research is that none of the sites were starting *Success4* school improvement with a clean slate. Buildings/districts had been involved in prior school improvement efforts and had established a track record with IBI, school improvement work in their particular AEA, NISDC, etc. This past experience was now having an impact on the present, influencing either the shape of *Success4* or the direction taken with it.

In each of the 13 sites visited, there is a leadership team in place. In fact, various kinds of central teams were encountered (reflecting either the status of *Success4* locally, the size of the district, or which model was being applied). In one case, a steering team of some 30 members (including building representatives, principals, central office staff, and counselors) is coordinating the initiative districtwide. In a similar situation, there is a district core team and building level goal teams (e.g., the Middle School Responsibility Team). In another district there is a Schoolwide Leadership Team numbering 21 people, including community representatives. In those cases where the building is the ‘site,’ two variants were found. In some places (mainly where *Success4* and school improvement are one and the same), the building’s school improvement team is the coordinating group. In others (mainly where *Success4* is one part of school improvement), the *Success4* team is one of several design teams – with a school improvement team coordinating all the various initiatives, *Success4* included. Although the final structure is decided by what works locally, the pattern of district steering group, building improvement teams, and action/goal/design teams seems to be fairly general – with *Success4* being acknowledged at one or more of the levels.



Several key considerations emerged as important ingredients of the membership issue:

- Inclusion has been a major preoccupation. Particularly (but not exclusively) at the building level, team membership has been constructed very carefully. In one instance, each functional team in the school – grade level teams, specials, associates, etc. – is represented on the *Success4* team which, according to those involved, really helped with the task of sharing the ideas and information gained during the initial training sessions. In another building, where school improvement is well established, the school improvement team is composed of representatives from each grade, the specials, the counseling staff, and the administration. At this same school, membership of the school improvement team is rotational with some members ‘rotating off’ annually. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of *Success4* school improvement is the broad-based involvement of all kinds of staff – classroom teachers, administrators, counselors (they are pivotally involved; *Success4* really has given them the opportunity to step up to the plate), para-educators, associates, bus drivers, playground and lunchroom supervisors, etc. At one elementary school, the staff members prefer to work together rather than breaking into sub-groups – they are all on the school improvement team!
- Consistency of membership has been a real plus – resulting in increased continuity of effort and more predictability of application.
- Regularity (of meeting times) also helps the flow of planning into implementation. Most teams seem to meet on at least a monthly basis.
- Team structure has also proven very beneficial. One team, for instance, established by-laws that clarified the team’s function and purpose, its meeting times, its leadership, and the duties of its various members.
- Representation has been another key interest. One fairly typical building level *Success4* team includes representative students, teachers, staff, parents, and community members.
- Communication has been a major responsibility of these team members. At several sites, each team member was made responsible for sharing new ideas and information with an identified list of colleagues.
- Training was another preoccupation. Everyone centrally involved in *Success4* at the site level seems to have received some kind of training. What training they actually received was mainly determined by the training model being espoused in their particular AEA.

## TRAINING

Team members spent the first year (often referred to as the ‘planning year’) heavily involved in AEA training programs – once a month in some cases. Content training (and how to process it) was a popular focus. Trisha Wells, Randy Sprick, Michael

“Several key considerations emerged as important ingredients of the membership issue.”

- Inclusion
- Consistency
- Regularity
- Team structure
- Representation
- Communication
- Training

“  
*Participants  
are  
vociferous  
that all  
training  
experiences  
should be  
followed up  
by planning  
time and  
in-house  
support.*”

Grinder, and Vern Jones (either in person or in the form of their training materials) were popular choices. Popular topics for training have been behavior management, brain-based learning, control/choice theory, group facilitation, Dimensions of Learning, multiple intelligences/learning styles, instructional strategies, and Quality Schools. More often than not, the whole *Success4* team attended the training events.

Several issues emerged from these experiences:

- While the training activities generally drew rave reviews, this was not always the case. Sometimes the participants had reservations about the external trainer(s). A criticism (at one site) was that excellent content was not always matched by the same quality of process.
- Participants are vociferous that all training experiences should be followed up by planning time (i.e. time to assimilate the new ideas, to share them with immediate colleagues, and to incorporate them in their lesson plans) and in-house support (including coaching). This need for support inevitably prompts a connection with the AEA and provides a real opportunity for AEA consultants to work closely with site members on an ongoing basis. Indeed, in all the case study sites visited, the AEA is a major player in supporting the improvement efforts.
- One site chose to go forward with Linda Munger’s study group training. This enabled those involved to explore aspects of the AEA model (including brain-based learning and behavior management) while retaining the three district goals previously identified with the help of NISDC. This is the district where a strong tradition has been established of having on-site/in-house training specifically geared to the needs identified locally.
- The members of another site team attended the Trisha Wells training sessions in AEA 1 and then were able to hire her to help them launch the initiative back in their building. She continues to play a major role in their work, not only training staff but also speaking with parents and the school board along the way. Given her background in IBI, Trisha Wells has been a valuable resource for sites involved in *Success4*. She has worked extensively in AEAs 1, 2, and 6.
- The training sessions, for example those in AEA 1 and AEA 10, were much appreciated by the participating team members who felt that they were given time to learn, opportunities to hear from other buildings, and two kinds of useful information – “concrete stuff” and the “big picture.”
- At another site, the participants found it difficult to get off the ground and were frustrated (“finding a focus originally was tough”). Then they built their Tiger Traits – their version of Guidelines for Success – and trained mainly students but also staff and parents in how to implement them using grade level action plans. The action planning training session occurred during a summer retreat and was the “culmination of all our groundwork.”

- All sites proved adept at connecting with and including in the school improvement ‘mix’ the various past and present training opportunities not directly linked with *Success4*. In terms of training in school improvement processes, several sites cited the importance of working with NISDC, particularly in the area of action planning. In AEA 2, *Success4* became another support for the well-established ‘climate and culture’ work being undertaken in sites across the AEA. With its emphasis on student resiliency and ‘kids first,’ the work in AEA 2 also became an early link between *Success4* and Character Counts.

Transfer of training is always a major concern. What was learned during the *Success4* training sessions was shared in a variety of ways. At one school in AEA 6, regular updates were given out following each of the 9 training days. At other site, ideas were shared during staff meetings, early dismissals, and other staff development time. One school invited a team from another district to give them a presentation on their work in IBI. In another school, the counselor produced a binder full of information for each staff member. More recently, this same binder was used again when a staff team reported on their progress with *Success4* to teams from other buildings in the same district. It was at this initial sharing stage that the sites with coordinating teams set up to be formally linked to other teams were at a clear advantage. Members of the school’s improvement team attended the training activities and were then expected to report back, for instance, to their grade level colleagues.

While some other buildings relied on whole staff presentations (from team members and/or AEA staff), one site set up a summer retreat with the express purpose of sharing the new ideas and planning on the strength of them. In one medium-sized school district, all central committee members received Randy Sprick training – on one of three opportunities – and then participated in the organization of a districtwide in-service to disseminate the ideas. Videocassette tapes were also made available to support the dissemination process in the buildings.

An enterprising site, realizing the importance of time for training and planning activities, applied for and was granted an innovative calendar (with staff development days spaced out during the year). Some of the time was then used to send all staff members on ‘scouting’ visits to other schools and districts engaged in similar change initiatives. What was discovered in this district – and elsewhere – was that time devoted to working together on priority issues has an important side effect: the growth of staff ownership and collegiality.

Many sites found that by creating collaborative working arrangements, the school climate improved – as did the staff’s ability to work together more effectively in the

“  
*All sites proved adept at connecting with and including in the school improvement ‘mix’ the various past and present training opportunities not directly linked with Success4.*  
”

“  
If the site  
is following  
more of a  
'content'  
model, the  
participants  
were more  
likely to  
provide a very  
specific  
definition of  
*Success4*.  
”

future. When one staff was split up into 5 groups to work on the first drafts of their Expectations for Common Areas, a dynamic that had existed between the core team and the rest of the staff melted away. In summary, when the members of one site team were asked about the ways they had transferred the training, they listed the following: facilitated small groups, early dismissals and building level inservices, Phase Three support groups (focusing on control theory), and one-on-one mentoring sessions.

Another important 'reinforcer' of training experiences has been the 'showcasing' of one site's efforts – for school teams in the same district, or for those interested across an AEA, or, indeed, for a wider audience at the annual symposiums.

What became very clear from the case study research is that, at *Success4* sites generally, staff development has provided ample opportunities to study the research behind *Success4* – thus generating the knowledge base (concerning possible 'external' solutions) with which to tackle the identified 'internal' problems. At one site, where the work was well facilitated by the AEA's *Success4* consultant, a copy of Randy Sprick's book *Champs* was given to every member of staff. At the same time, site team members have taught modules from the book to their colleagues. These same participants also cited other training opportunities that had served their cause. These included: other AEA workshops, Peter Holly's NISDC training (provided through the auspices of AEA 12), the 1999 *Success4* Symposium, the Search Institute, etc.

## PERSONAL DEFINITIONS OF *SUCCESS4*

Milbrey McLaughlin, writing about change efforts at the local level, pointed out that variability is the rule and uniformity is the exception to the rule. Participants in *Success4* certainly had a variety of different definitions in mind when they described their personal thoughts about *Success4* for the visiting member of the research team. "Nobody does it exactly the same," we were told. We found that much depended on whether the participants were working with a largely **content** specific model (like that of Randy Sprick or Trisha Wells) or a school improvement **process** model. Some AEAs promoted the former, while some emphasized the importance of the latter (and some embraced both). Indeed, in our experience, the model being promoted by the AEA was the strongest determinant of a particular site's local version of *Success4*. A related factor was the site's recent history with school improvement. Participants in one district, for instance, declared (somewhat apologetically) that "we molded *Success4* to fit us, not the other way round...*Success4* fitted in to what we were already working on." If the site is following more of a 'content' model, the participants were more likely to provide a very specific definition of *Success4*. Some examples are as follows:

“*Success4* means working on instructional discipline. It’s about teaching the strategies to be used in improving the classroom/ school climate; teaching teachers first, then the students, an instructional approach to discipline.”

“It’s all about Tiger Traits – it involves a disciplinary model (like Boystown) and using common practices, showing respect, being polite, respecting other people’s property...the purpose is to create a community where learning can take place in a non-threatening, practical kind of way.”

“It’s the plan we’re using to provide schoolwide consistency, consequences, and climate...everyone working together to make it a better place.”

“It’s comprehensive discipline using an instructional approach with broad-based educational, social, and emotional outcomes...providing schoolwide solutions to discipline problems using our ‘Steps to Success.’ ”

If a more general ‘process’ definition is being used, then the comments were more likely to refer to school improvement:

“It’s the vehicle for school improvement with the total involvement of the community, students, and staff. It’s a design for improvement.”

“*Success4* is the school improvement plan.”

“*Success4* is part of the plan for schoolwide school improvement efforts.”

“We haven’t called it *Success4*; we’ve called it school improvement and stressed that it’s not an additional thing to do. It’s about achieving student success using our three school improvement goals: writing, respect, and research/technology.”

As originally envisioned, *Success4* was intended to be holistic and comprehensive. Its purpose was to meet social, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual needs by working with students, their schools, their families, and their communities. Unsurprisingly,

“  
*If a more  
general  
‘process’  
definition is  
being used,  
then the  
comments  
were more  
likely to refer  
to school  
improvement.*”

“  
...the most  
successful  
sites have  
embedded  
clearly  
defined  
*Success4*  
activities  
within their  
general  
school  
improvement  
work.”

therefore, many definitions echoed these sentiments: *Success4* is about “all staff working together to achieve common goals for all students.” What we found, however, was that this kind of definition was more likely to be given by AEA staff members. Consequently, according to one such participant,

“It’s about the whole child, being mentally, physically, emotionally prepared; it’s the other half of what it takes to be effective in schools. It’s about establishing a community of learners, a way of life, being pervasive and providing four kinds of skills and resiliency...It’s about kids, schools, families, and communities – it’s 4 by 4.”

Given the differences between the specific content definitions and those that were more general, more process oriented, we were able to make the following observations:

- If the content model is very strong, then ‘process’ is either defined in terms of the content (i.e., how to process the content, meaning how to use it in the classroom) or ignored and treated as an entirely separate kind of activity.
- When the school improvement process is emphasized (and *Success4* is subsumed within school improvement), then content tends to be less strong.
- A balance is struck when clear content is processed as part of a site’s school improvement efforts. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the most successful sites have embedded clearly defined *Success4* activities (possibly as one demarcated goal area) within their general school improvement work.
- The more *Success4* is linked/merged with comprehensive school improvement the more indistinct it seems to become. What happens to the integrity of *Success4* is an interesting question. ‘Integrity,’ of course, can mean two things: being connected and having internal fidelity (‘honesty’) with original principles. Ironically, in the case of *Success4*, the more it achieves the former, the less it seems to retain the latter.

The issue here is whether *Success4* is a program or not. The majority of participants would say ‘no.’ As one person observed to us, “*Success4* is not a program...(it’s a way of) trying to blend everything (assets, control theory, *Success4*) together to be successful.” According to another participant, *Success4* is “part of the district’s whole school improvement efforts and cannot be isolated as just one program.” *Success4* is the vehicle to make a local response to locally identified problems (thus the variability that McLaughlin refers to); in responding, however, participants may well draw on various programs as the basis of their implementation plan. *Success4* itself might not be a program, but the solutions selected to meet the various problems identified during the *Success4* improvement process may well be programs. In short, *Success4* contains specific programs.



## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Although everyone participating in *Success4* emphasizes the importance of community involvement, this is still a major growth point for the initiative as a whole. While each of the case study sites is making some headway, community involvement, say the participants, is one of those areas where you can never do enough. At one site, for instance, business partners are a major form of support (during the case study visit, Burger King sponsored a family evening), community presenters help out during career days, parents join their children for ‘lunch-time extravaganzas,’ and the school contributes to a districtwide asset-building initiative supported by the Search Institute.

Another site is taking full advantage of the smallness of the district and its pre-existing strong sense of community. Teachers in this district, we were reminded, live in the community and care about its future. They see themselves as contributing to their community and the community contributing to their schools. They organized community nights when outside speakers gave presentations on the importance of parenting. The local radio station is a constant source of support, as is the Ministerial Association (several sites cited this same support) and the Optimists Club (which gives a student-of-the-month award).

In this same district, parents have also been very much involved in the *Success4* school improvement process. They helped with the needs assessment stage (by participating in walkabouts in the buildings and filling in surveys) and attended the action planning session with staff and students. Involving the community, said those at another site, “is how we do things around here.” Their *Success4* school improvement work has been tied to a very active School-to-Career partnership and Creative Outreach, a branch of School-Based Youth Services. Community speakers have been used on Activity days and during the school’s Diversity Week.

In Henry County, *Success4* is associated with several other communitywide endeavors in a collaborative attempt to create a seamless system of community-based, multi-agency support for children and families. A separate grant has been used to hire Mental Health specialists to work in the schools with Student Assistance Teams and parent education activities at the work-site are in an advanced stage of planning. In several of the larger districts across Iowa (*Success4* sites included), there is a long-standing tradition of having site councils – which contain parent, business, and community representatives.

Two barriers to further development were noted. One rural site, for instance, is composed of five communities and it has proved very difficult to create any collective

“  
*Involving  
the  
community...  
is how  
we do  
things  
around  
here.*”

”

“  
...outreach  
to the  
community  
is an  
effort  
to make the  
community  
know  
they are  
wanted  
and needed.”

community spirit. In several other sites, the temptation to inform (through newsletters, newspapers, etc) and not truly engage the community is still prevalent. Right or wrong, the emphasis is still on school improvement (with community support) – as opposed to community development. The ‘Assets’ work in several communities, Marshalltown included, has the promise to break this particular mold.

Indeed, in some *Success4* communities, communitywide efforts are being mounted to coalesce local support services. At one *Success4* site in AEA 7, the local churches, the Ministerial Alliance, the MAPLES Neighborhood Association, Partners in Education (PIE) and mentors from the local hospital are all providing support and student services. These partnerships, we were told, are not new, but have been strengthened by the onset of *Success4*. Writing another related grant (the Twenty-first Century Learning Center grant) has “helped build relationships” and further strengthened the local alliance. According to one of the participants, “the effort to outreach to the community is an effort to make the community know they are wanted and needed.”

At other sites, interagency work is becoming more of a common feature. One example is where the Department of Human Services, the Extension Office, the local Asset Coordinator, Family Connections (another grant), Character Counts, etc. are all combining to provide support for children and their families.

## SHARED VISIONING

Much of this (shared visioning work) occurred as part of school improvement initiatives that occurred prior to *Success4*. At one site, the participants talked about their school improvement mission statement, while, at another, the statement ‘**Work hard, Care about people and property, Make a difference, and Succeed**’ (WCMS) – along with the staff’s ‘Core beliefs’ – is on the wall in every classroom. A similar situation is the site where the students are encouraged to take advantage of ‘**Learning for life, Opportunities for all, Giving and gaining respect, Attitude of excellence, and Never give up**’ (LOGAN). In a medium-sized school district, the Belief Statement dates from the district’s strategic planning process. More recently, however, Guidelines for Success/Key Elements have been established as part of their *Success4* work.

This pattern seems to be fairly general: belief and mission statements generated previously (often with the help of NISDC) were followed by more specific purpose statements for *Success4*. As a consequence, at one site, the *Success4* participants have adopted a “philosophical approach which is that of instructional discipline, resulting in our Guidelines for Success.” Sometimes, what occurred, in what order and as part of which initiative has become blurred. After all, for some participants, it is all part of



their ongoing school improvement efforts. Where school improvement was already occurring, however, people applied for a *Success4* grant to realize their ambitions for (to give an example) “an improved climate and more consistency regarding discipline.”

There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. At one site, during the life of *Success4*, AEA 14 staff facilitated a citizens’ meeting during which material for a mission statement, belief statements, and long-term goals was generated. At another site, a “vision activity” was designed for all staff (significantly, students were also involved) and then a “small writing team completed the task.” Teachers were then asked to come up with individual statements related to their own work. At one elementary site where the participants were investing heavily in *Success4* (as the successor to IBI), a “Foundations Policy” was established. This contains four sections: Principles (mission statement, Guidelines for Success, and CARE (Cooperation, Appropriate Choices, Respect, and Effort); Roles and Responsibilities; Encouraging Responsible Choices; and Responsibility in the Common Areas.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

As with shared visioning, much of the needs assessment work was conducted prior to the inception of *Success4*. Indeed, in many cases, needs had already been identified that *Success4* was now selected to meet. In one district, for example, “school climate was the biggie. Common themes across all the data sources were inconsistent discipline and an atmosphere that was unwelcoming to parents.” At one site, where – as in AEA 2 - the student resiliency survey has been issued annually for several years, both the IBI and *Success4* needs assessments were conducted; taken together, all the data pointed to three areas of need: writing, respect, and research/technology.

For data gathering purposes, many sites used NISDC surveys (provided by Gordon S. Black, Thomas Bellamy or Victoria Bernhardt), the student resiliency survey or the Iowa Youth survey. When the data (from surveys, observations, and office referrals) were scrutinized at one site, the “playground emerged as the #1 issue.” In one medium-sized district where the participants have risen to the challenge of being needs-based data driven, those involved in *Success4* were able to draw from an accumulating “common school improvement database – we use the same database for different grant applications.” In this district, CREST surveys were used to gather data more pertinent to *Success4*.

Some sites did needs assessment ‘by the book,’ choosing to use either the original IBI materials or the updated *Success4* version. As a result, needs were identified by using

“*In one district... common themes across all the data sources were inconsistent discipline and an atmosphere that was unwelcoming to parents.*”

“  
...*Success4*  
is more  
likely to  
be seen  
as the  
vehicle  
that can  
be used  
to achieve  
one or two  
of the  
goals.”

the components/critical elements contained in the materials. At the same time, the more comprehensive and systematic the process is used, the more likely parents and other stakeholders would be consulted. A very limited amount of door-to-door surveying was used in one instance and, in another, “we involved all the stakeholders and prioritized the top three critical elements for each of the four domains.” Clearly, as some sites appreciated, the needs assessment stage presented an opportunity to harness parent and stakeholder involvement and buy-in.

## GOALS

Just as some sites have tried to separate *Success4* from other school improvement activities and other sites have merged them, it is exactly the same with goals – in some cases they’re separate and in others they’re merged. An example of the latter is the site where “they’re one and the same...it’s hard to tell the difference. School improvement came first with the data collection – then *Success4* came along and meshed with the emerging goals (climate and reading).” At another site, a graphic organizer has been used to mesh the so-called NISDC school improvement goals (reading in the elementary school, communication in the middle school, and alternative scheduling in the high school) and the *Success4* areas of interest generated by working with AEA 3 (for example, brain-based learning and behavior management plans). As one participant remarked, “You achieve more when they’re meshed than when they’re stand-alone.” Similar comments were received at other sites: some examples were “they’re the same thing” and “by working on our (school improvement) goals we’re doing *Success4*; we had to make it the same thing – there was a strong bias against making it something different.” In one district, however, the goals are so merged that, to some participants, school improvement has become a “hodge-podge.” In another group of sites, *Success4* goals are one subset of school improvement goals generally. In one large district, *Success4* sites had to include *Success4* within their work toward district goals that included technology, literacy, student achievement, and community connections. In a building-based *Success4* project, *Success4* is one goal area within several school improvement goal areas. What seems to be the case is that, where school improvement goals existed previously, (e.g., for instance, School-to-Work) *Success4* is more likely to be seen as the vehicle (a program/a set of strategies) that can be used to achieve one or two of the goals.

Planning and implementing *Success4* has coincided with the follow-up to the state legislation regarding all districts in Iowa being required to have Comprehensive School Improvement Plans by September 2000. In this context, therefore, *Success4* activities have provided valuable experience of a) how to synchronize district and building goals and b) how to create goals that embrace both academic and social/

emotional/behavioral aspirations. At one site in AEA 16, for instance, the district's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan will contain the stipulation that each building has a "*Success4* goal" alongside the more academic goals called for by the legislation. Using the advice that, when it comes to goal setting 'less really leads to more,' sites have become adept at collapsing identified needs into two or three major goal areas. They have also learned the wisdom of having district-level school improvement goals and then creating reciprocal building-level goals that both respond to local data and contribute to the accomplishment of the system-level goals. As one participant remarked, "we have social goals at both levels."

## ACTION PLANNING

One rather surprising feature of *Success4* work at site level is how much the original guideline materials are **not** being used. This is partly because a great deal of needs assessment activity had already occurred (the materials, therefore, were not seen as immediately relevant) and partly because several AEAs chose to espouse what were essentially content models that have some pre-existing and built-in process advice. This, of course, has not been the case everywhere. Some sites have religiously followed the process advice contained in the Action Guides. In particular, the materials on action planning (Action Guide 1), when used in conjunction with the suggested best practices in the four domains (Action Guide 3), have been utilized extensively. Some sites, however, had already learned how to do systematic action planning from a prior (and, in some cases, ongoing) relationship with NISDC. This fact was often acknowledged during the interview process. In this context, however, a possible confusion arose when site members completed the action plans using Peter Holly's '1, 4, 5, 2, 3' format suggested by both the *Success4* materials and NISDC and then were asked to use a different format for district planning.

In AEA 1 sites, where the sequence of suggested steps comes with the content package being used, a school principal agreed that "we have a calendar, an assembly schedule, a sequenced order for the social skill of the month, but not an action plan. We've gone through the process, but not put it into the format – we have all the pieces." In contrast, one building in AEA 5 has a detailed action plan for each of its goals, while, according to the AEA *Success4* consultant, all sites in AEA 12 were trained in how to construct action plans by incorporating the *Success4* 'best practices.' In another small district site (in AEA 13), where the students were involved in the action planning process, each grade level (6-12) came up with an action plan using the locally-produced Tiger Traits as their goals. During the school year 1999-2000, these action plans have been the subject of their meetings on 'Tiger Trait Tuesdays' and now, according

“  
...when it  
comes to  
goal setting  
'less really  
leads to more,'  
sites have  
become  
adept at  
collapsing  
identified  
needs into  
two or three  
major goal  
areas.”

“

*All  
sites  
have  
received  
a great  
deal of  
support.*

”

- *Grant Money*
- *Staff Deliberation*
- *AEA support*
- *NISDC support*
- *Colleagues*
- *Students*
- *Parents*
- *School  
Administrators*

to one participating parent, “we need to maintain the momentum; we need to review, get the kids in it again, and discuss what’s worked/not worked.” In a larger district, the strategic plan contains district level action plans, while the schools have been used to having building level action plans. As a result, as far as *Success4* is concerned, those involved have had to clear up some uncertainty in terms of what was considered to be the “murky” interface between vertical (K-12 district) and horizontal (building) planning.

It is in the area of action planning that one real advance has been made. In attesting to the help received from NISDC, participants pointed to the usefulness of the particular advice that they had received concerning the establishment of success criteria/success indicators. Success criteria (as one section of an action plan) have improved in three ways: they are increasingly seen as the **specific results** that have to be achieved in order to **impact student performance** at a particular, **quantifiable rate of success**. Thus, the members of one site were able to cite their success criteria as follows: attendance will increase to 98% and discipline notices will decrease by 50%. They also stated that, during seminar time, students would be increasingly engaged in team building activities, student-to-student tutoring, and community building – but omitted to put a numerical value on the intended increase.

## SUPPORTS

All sites have been the recipients of a great deal of support. They listed the following aspects as the most valuable:

- The grant money which, according to one teacher involved, was used to pay for “release time, stipends, and subs.”
- The time created for staff deliberation, although, as we were told on many occasions, more time is always needed, especially “to meet the changing needs of kids.”
- AEA content help. Both instructional services and special education staff have proved invaluable. At one site the special education building representative joined the school improvement team and, at another, the school’s social worker did likewise.
- AEA facilitation of the improvement process. Without this guidance, the sites would not have been able to advance at the kind of pace achieved thus far.
- Training opportunities of all kinds and the work of external trainer-consultants. One caution that was offered, however, was that district in-services need to be supported by collaborative planning time – otherwise their impact is dissipated.
- NISDC process support for the sites’ school improvement efforts.
- Immediate colleagues (“each other”), students (“the kids themselves”), parents, and community patrons (including, at more than one site, the Ministerial Association).

- District and building administrators whom were often described in such terms as “extremely supportive.”

## IMPLEMENTATION

When asked the all-important question (how would you describe your stage of implementation, *early*, *developing*, *mid-course*, or *well-developed*?), many respondents said *mid-course*. The reasons they gave were as follows:

- “We’re *mid-course* because it’s coming, but there’s a lot still to do; there are multiple things to do yet. It’s taking longer than expected; still (we feel) further along the road than most schools. We believe in it and we’re sticking to it. We’re determined to succeed; we’re in it for the long haul.”
- “We’re *mid-course*. The Tiger Traits have given us focus and direction. Everyone knows where they’re going. We are in need of a few adjustments/fine-tuning; we need to get back with the kids and hear their views about the progress made. Some refinement is necessary and tweaking is needed. We are seeing results – it’s definitely an easier year. It’s only the first year of implementation with the kids – it doesn’t happen overnight. We’re still working out the bugs. Despite our progress (we’re applying the pure model, we have stability of the key players and we’re committed to this as a long-term effort), we still have a major challenge ahead of us – active learning, including a Service Learning Project for graduation.”
- “We’re at a mid-way point (*mid-course*); the work is taking longer than expected.” “We’re between *developing* and *mid-course*. It has been a long process even to get this far and achieve this level of consistency. We still need to work on referrals and consequences. We’ve been concentrating on the Guidelines (for Success) and two social skills per month. We know that pacing is related to commitment, so we’re in this long-term; it can’t be a quick fix. Fine-tuning is needed in the light of our practice.”
- “It depends on which goal we’re talking about: writing is *mid-course* to *well-developed*, respect is *developing* to *mid-course* and research/technology is *developing*. Overall, we’re at least *mid-course*. ”

In a larger school district a range of responses was received. This suggests that, in a bigger system, the kind of response elicited might well depend on where the respondent is situated in the district. In this particular site, for instance, *Success4* is further advanced in two of the buildings than it is in the other buildings.

It was also noticeable in the responses that the members of the sites with more ambitious agendas were more likely to describe the implementation efforts as *early* or *developing*. This seems linked to the fact that these participants are being realistic and know that they are in this change effort for the ‘long haul’ – and that it is still early days in the overall change process.

“  
...How  
would you  
describe  
your  
stage of  
implementation?  
Many  
respondents  
said  
‘mid-course’.”

”

“  
...more  
ambitious  
agendas  
were more  
likely to  
describe the  
implementation  
efforts as  
'early' or  
'developing'  
...they are  
in this  
change effort  
for the  
long haul....”

When it comes to what is being specifically implemented, much depends on the AEA model being applied and the degree of its specificity. Several sites, in following the work of Randy Sprick and Trisha Wells, are implementing Guidelines for Success and Common Area expectations. Local versions of this prescription include the Tiger Traits, WCMS, PRIDE, and Steps to Success.

It would be incorrect, however, to draw the conclusion that this is all that is happening. At one site connections between life skills and work skills (*Success4* and School-to-Work) are being made and reading – involving Guided Reading, needs-based grouping, diagnostic teaching, active learning and parental support at home – is a major focus at the elementary level. In one small rural district, a plethora of changes are being implemented. There is an active Responsibility Team in each building and schoolwide Responsibility Plans are being developed. In the Middle School, student engagement is a major priority. The students received leadership training at AEA 3 and then met weekly to decide what to change about their school. The water supply was their first project (it was changed); the boys' bathrooms were dealt with next. All the students in this district have been “colorized” (in terms of their personality and learning styles) and the topic is a constant source of conversation between the students and their teachers.

In a middle school site, the Six Traits of Writing, respect, and research/technology are the three areas being covered, alongside the district-related work on standards and benchmarks, unit planners, and multiple assessments. In two elementary school sites (both in AEA 1 and both deep into instructional discipline and work on Common Area plans), the classroom atmosphere is changing as much – if not more so – than the school climate. Community circles, corrective feedback, and new classroom techniques (from instructional discipline) are all contributing to changing the classroom and the teaching/learning relationships. Within the same district, in one elementary, staff members are focusing on tolerance of diversity and class meetings, while, in the middle school, faculty members are working on several innovations. These include: expectations for the Common Areas, early morning procedures, extended opportunities for finishing work, welcoming students to class, instructional strategies (taken from the *Champs* modules), and providing mental health support for those students in need. The staff members at another site are concentrating on the implementation of ‘Talking it Out’ (conflict resolution), ‘Boys and Girls Getting Along’ (sexual harassment), Boystown (social skills) and the application of their CARE program. A Foster Grandparent program is also under way. Other sites provided lists of their specific changes. Some examples are as follows:

- Student responsibility, study groups, schoolwide behavior management, preventative classroom management (Randy Sprick), Common Area behavioral expectations, and posters.



- Levels, Assets, and Pillars (Character Counts).
- Schoolwide proactive practices, the 5Ps (present, punctual, prepared, polite, and positive), the discipline continuum, manners bucks, an after school program, the refocus room, etc.
- Building level responsibility plans, Guidelines for Success, “the problem solving team concept,” Student Assistance Teams, and START in the middle school (multi-age discussion groups that meet daily for Sharing Thoughts And Reaching Togetherness).

In one high school (there are still comparatively fewer high school *Success4* sites) the staff members are working on the improvement of both student behavior and the overall school spirit. Their changes include: skill building in seminars, volunteerism in the community, and a Fun Day, while focusing on attendance and discipline which involves recording discipline problems and monitoring attendance data.

## CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A key feature of *Success4* is that those responsible for implementation at the local level have been encouraged to look for support from other related activities. School-to-Work, Early Childhood initiatives (including the state-wide emphasis on reading), Character Education (including the very popular program Character Counts, which is an important focus in several *Success4* sites), Drug-free Schools, School-Based Youth Services, Peer Helpers, at-risk projects, and Project Lift (a before and after school program) have all been involved in collaborative working arrangements. Some sites are learning the wisdom of using different funding streams to support the same goals and, as one participant pointed out, the connections have happened “not because of *Success4*, but with *Success4*.” At one site, for example, *Success4* is supported by Creative Outreach (a countywide School-Based Youth Services program), Project Lift, a violence prevention/substance abuse class taught by the counselors, the district’s School-to Career work, and the faculty’s continuing work with issues arising from their student resilience data. During the summer of 2000, several staff members are intending to explore the Character Counts program and assess its relevance for their work. Asset-building is another important preoccupation and is the subject of districtwide development work at one of the larger *Success4* sites.

Continuous improvement is another key feature of *Success4* change efforts. Participants at all the sites gave very similar responses to the question regarding their ‘house style’ and their ongoing capacity for change-making. Yes, they said, a continuous improvement model is exactly what we’re trying to institutionalize, **but** we’ve still got to work on one particular area – the use of data to record progress over time. It should be said, however, that a couple of the sites are making giant strides even in this area.

“  
*Some sites are learning the wisdom of using different funding streams to support the same goals.*”

“  
...but  
we’ve  
still got  
to work  
on one  
particular  
area –  
the use  
of data  
to record  
progress  
over time.”

Typical responses were as follows:

“Yes, we’re practicing a continuous improvement model, but progress is not being systematically checked. Action research is the missing link.”

“We have an awareness of the importance of pre- and post-data, but we’re not recording progress (beyond impressionistic stuff). What’s needed is hard data like (the numbers of) office referrals and the amount of time spent with kids giving feedback.”

“Our capacity has grown tremendously, but how to show progress over time?”

“We need to be more deliberate in using our needs to direct goals for next year.”

“In our district we have a long history of school improvement initiatives. Indeed, *Success4* can be seen as a way of demonstrating the capacity already grown...we still need to record progress over time.”

“We’ve added the data piece to SBDM. We used data to identify which programs to use; now we need data points to see if these programs are succeeding. We need to show growth – how to measure success?”

The participants at one site realized that, while continuous improvement is one of their strengths, they share the same need – to be able to record and check for progress over time. Consequently, they have organized a staff training day this August on the topic of action research. A cadre of teachers will be trained in the process and methodology of action research and then supported by means of guided practice and coaching throughout the course of the next school year. At the same time as these teachers are being trained in the collection and use of classroom level data, a *Success4* district team will be trained in the compilation and use of project level data. This systematic approach is most commendable.

Some sites, however, are already in good shape in this important area. At one school, for instance, needs assessment data were used to select the original goals and now



“up-close data” is being collected on an ongoing basis to track the extent of their goal accomplishment. Everything that happens is recorded in data. They habitually collect writing samples, statistics regarding the frequency of detentions and use of the plan (time-out) room, feedback from participants after their activity days, and student resiliency data. All the data are then scrutinized and plans adjusted in the light of the emergent issues.

At another site in AEA 15 where the members are committed to exemplary work in this area, a kind of district profile/portfolio has been created. This contains a list of the current school improvement efforts, the beliefs and vision of the district, and **success indicators** that are reviewed on an annual basis using data related to both climate and the instructional process – and then new improvement goals set. Multiple sources of data are used to undertake this annual review: Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED), district-based criterion-referenced assessments, instructional process questionnaires, climate and student self-concept questionnaires, plus data relating to truancy, disciplinary actions, failing grades, and drop out and attendance rates.

In a similar situation in AEA 10, the principles of TQE are being followed assiduously; consequently, continuous improvement – characterized by ‘Plan, Do, Study, Act’ (PDSA) and databased decision making – is the key activity. As one participant remarked, “every decision is made with data; we’re continually revisiting and being willing to revise as needed.” Their success, she said, is attributable to “living and learning through the change process.” Interestingly, at another site, one participant commented that “the concept (continuous improvement) is definitely bought into by our AEA consultants and district administrators.”

The *Success4* Action Guides were produced to support site members in their change efforts. In the experience of this research team, however, these materials have not been used extensively. There are various reasons for this. With the AEAs playing a gatekeeper role, sometimes the sites were not even aware that the materials existed. Even when they were aware of them, the typical response was to pick and choose the parts most relevant to local needs. As many schools and districts had committed to a needs assessment process prior to receiving the guides, this was the section least used by the case study sites. Some of the sites visited did use the action planning section (either the *Success4* version or the NISDC equivalent), often in collaboration with the best practices found in the ‘content’ section.

The sites are only now realizing the importance of action research and the role it can play in their future plans. It is to be expected, therefore, that the action research section will be used – especially if it is incorporated into the kind of training opportu-

“  
...every  
decision  
is made  
with data;  
we’re  
continually  
revisiting  
and  
being  
willing  
to revise  
as needed.”

“  
...the time  
spent on  
collaboration,  
relationship  
building,  
and getting  
everyone  
on board  
with the  
same  
understanding  
had definitely  
paid off.”

nities which site members are requesting. The materials concerning techniques and methods for processing the human side of change have been used – selectively so – when the occasion demanded. If the study group format was used or the importance of team facilitation was recognized, then these particular materials were more likely to be used. The portfolio sheets contained in the Action Guides have been used in several AEAs for accountability purposes.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVE

When participants were asked the same question (‘What are the characteristics that have made your *Success4* work successful thus far?’), there was a remarkable degree of unanimity in their responses. Indeed, at one site, the members summed up their thoughts in a three-part sentence. They acknowledged the importance of **focusing together** (inclusively) on the **right things** (in order to meet a set of real needs with concrete practical strategies) with the **best supports** available (including teamwork). Looking across the case studies, these three themes were repeated time and time again.

1. Inclusion was a key theme. Everyone used the term involvement. At one site, for instance, they talked about the importance of “broad-based staff involvement” and, at another, they stressed the centrality of “total involvement,” which gave them the opportunity of “building the Common Area expectations together; it wasn’t one group telling us what to do.” Site members were also quick to remind us that the process of involvement led to the crucial side benefits of “empowerment” and “ownership” – both crucial ingredients in their own right. Indeed, as one teacher observed, “Hard work breeds commitment, ownership, and a willingness to share.”

Commitment, enthusiasm, and dedication were terms frequently used in respondents’ comments. Clearly they felt that the time spent on collaboration, relationship building, and getting everyone on board with the same understanding had definitely paid off. Above all, participants have come to see the value of team effort and working together for a common cause. In so doing, they noted at one site, “relationships have improved and there’s a friendlier climate; we’ve been able to discuss through barriers and deal with serious issues in a reasonable, respectful manner.” By positively impacting the school’s climate, this faculty – paraprofessionals and supervisors included - is creating more capacity for future work of this kind. In a similar situation elsewhere, participants observed that working on *Success4* has “brought us together as a staff – appreciating each other for what we do.” At another site we were reminded of one of the side benefits accruing from time spent together on staff development activities: “teachers during inservices are able to utilize each other’s ideas and ...collaborate more.”

2. Part of the success of *Success4* is attributable to the fact that it met a real need. There was, said one team member, “a great fit between *Success4* and the school’s (i.e. students’) needs.” “Staff,” said another, “are changing for kids.” In other words, there is something about the ‘neediness’ of kids today that is causing teachers everywhere to adjust their practices. “We’re offering practical, hands-on, real experiences,” claimed one teacher group, while colleagues in another building talked about “changing the academic to incorporate the affective – through the use of new instructional strategies.” At other sites, brain-based research, constructivist thinking, and Expeditionary Learning have all influenced instructional practice.

Indeed, while grounded in research-based best practices, the success of *Success4* can be largely attributed to its emphasis on dealing with the everyday, concrete concerns of educators. “Teachers for the most part are buying into it,” we were told, “because of the relevancy and (the fact that they are) able to use it – it’s concrete.” In addition, the changing *Success4* classroom has been the stage for a meeting of the ways between special education and general education. A combination of instructional discipline, diagnostic instruction, and differentiated instruction is changing the face of classrooms across Iowa.

There is also a good fit between what is occurring under the banner of *Success4* and other classroom initiatives such as the APL instructional strategies work in schools and districts in AEA 12. As one participant remarked, *Success4* “added to what was already going on; it was easy to see the connections.”

There is also rich evidence that the kind of work represented by schoolwide expectations is having an impact not only in the Common Areas but also in the classroom and, even more impressively, at home in the family setting. In many instances we were told that the skills learned at school were being transferred to the home situation. There is clearly a common belief amongst educators that, in terms of student progress, behavioral success leads to academic success. According to one participant, “if behavior and responsibility are there, hopefully, it will carry over into academics...Reading should go smoothly when behavior is good.” Added a colleague, “I don’t think you can teach curriculum until behavior is such that they can learn.”

3. Many supports have contributed to the successes of *Success4*. Administrative leadership has been a key feature (one staff said that their “principal has shown that SBDM can work!”), as has teacher leadership and teamwork. When asked what has been the most useful support for your work, one staff team chorused “each other.” School counselors have played a pivotal role in *Success4* and have often demonstrated their leadership abilities in the work of school improvement

“  
...changing  
the  
academic  
to  
incorporate  
the  
affective –  
through  
the use of  
new  
instructional  
strategies.”

“  
...the use of  
a common  
language,  
consistency  
of application,  
and  
'stickability'  
over the  
long haul.  
These features  
...are created,  
molded, and  
sustained...”

teams and action teams. Above all, however, the rank-and-file participants themselves have been the making of *Success4*. Students have worked for their schools, as have parents and community patrons. In one building, for instance, the “family atmosphere” became a support in itself – but those involved had to create it in the first place.

Other major supports have been the use of a common language, consistency of application, and ‘stickability’ over the long haul. These features do not just appear, however; they are created, molded, and sustained by the real heroes of *Success4* – school people across Iowa. They are the ones for whom *Success4* has meant “school improvement, staff development, and professional dialogue.” They are the ones who have been willing to go the extra mile to **work together** using good **processes and strategies** with the support of ample **resources** in the common endeavor to help all students be successful in school and in life.

Elsewhere Peter Holly has said that the implementation of all major educational changes should be supported by the 5 Cs: Compelling Vision, Challenging Expectations, Curriculum/ Instructional Process, Climate, and Collaboration. Judged by these five factors many of the *Success4* sites visited as part of this case study research project would seem to be in good shape. According to the evidence of our research thus far, the majority of the site-based implementation efforts are:

- Guided and inspired by compelling visions;
- Grounded in challenging behavioral and academic expectations for all students - the lode star for *Success4*;
- Based on appropriate programs and instructional strategies that are robust enough to be the vehicles for deep and sustained change;
- Supported and strengthened by positive climates and conducive learning environments;
- Underpinned by collaborative partnerships that includes students, teachers, administrators, parents and other family members, community and business persons, and all those committed to the improvement of their schools.

## NOTES PAGE

## NOTES PAGE



